

Remarks

Claims 1, 3-6, 8-12, 14 and 16-24 are pending in the present application. Claim 20 has been amended. No new matter is believed to have been added.

Claim Objections

Claim 20 was objected to for inadvertently depending from claim 1 where it should depend from claim 10¹. Claim 20 has been amended here per the Examiner's suggestion to reflect dependence upon claim 10. Accordingly, the applicants respectfully request that the claim objection be withdrawn.

35 U.S.C. §102

Claims 1, 3-6, 8, 10-12, 17, 18, 21 and 22 are rejected under 35 U.S.C. §102(e) as being anticipated by U.S. Pat. Pub. No. 2002/0129127 to Romero et al. (hereinafter, "Romero").

35 U.S.C. §103

Claims 9, 14, 19 and 23 are rejected under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) as being obvious in view of U.S. Pat. Pub. No. 2002/0129127 to Romero et al. (hereinafter, "Romero").

A "DECLARATION OF PRIOR INVENTION IN THE UNITED STATES TO OVERCOME CITED PATENT (37 C.F.R. §1.131)" is being filed concurrently herewith. It is submitted that this declaration provides sufficient evidence to show a conception date for the subject matter of claims 1, 3-6, 8-12, 14 and 16-24 prior to the March 6, 2001 filing date of *Romero* as well as diligence on the part of the inventors and their attorneys just prior to the March 6, 2001 filing date of *Romero* until the filing of the subject application on July 24, 2001.

Accordingly, it is submitted that the *Romero* is not prior art as to the claims of the subject application and cannot form a basis for a rejection under either 35 U.S.C. §102(e) or 35 U.S.C. §103. Hence, the applicants respectfully request that the rejections to the claims be withdrawn. It is believed that the filing of this paper and the accompanying RULE §1.131 declaration does not raise any new issues. Accordingly, entry of these papers in this application is respectfully requested.

CONCLUSION

The Examiner is encouraged to contact the undersigned to resolve efficiently, any formal matters or to discuss any aspects of the application or of this response. Otherwise, early notification of allowable subject matter is respectfully solicited.

Respectfully submitted,

Stevens & Showalter, L.L.P.

By /Thomas E. Lees/

Thomas E. Lees Reg. No. 46,867

7019 Corporate Way
Dayton, Ohio 45459-4238
Phone: 937-438-6848
Fax: 937-438-2124
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¹ See for example, the Office action mailed December 04, 2006, page 2.